

A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

In the beginning there was the nameless bard who recounted the adventures of Gilgamesh and his crowd. After a while there was Shakespeare and Chaucer and the nameless scribes who catalogued the ancient Chinese mythologies, philosophies and pre-Imperial legends dating back two thousand years to the roving Taoist scholars, in the work we know as the **Tian Wen**. Then, after centuries of roundshouldered savants illuminating manuscripts in Carthusian cells, circa 1440-1450, the German printer Johann Gensfleisch (called Gutenberg) printed the first Latin edition of the Bible using movable type. The idea caught on, and everybody started writing. (A nasty trend that continues today, generated by the misconception that "anyone can write... hell, if Harold Robbins can make a living from it, so can I!")

And Samuel Johnson begat Thomas Hardy; and Thomas Hardy begat Nathaniel Hawthorne; and Nathaniel Hawthorne begat Mary Shelley; and Mary Shelley begat Herman Melville; and Herman Melville begat D.H. Lawrence; and D.H. Lawrence begat Scott Fitzgerald; and Scott Fitzgerald begat Yukio Mishima; and Yukio Mishima begat Jorge Luis Borges; and Borges begat Fritz Leiber; and Leiber begat me, because "anyone can write", and this is the November editorial, the subject of which is... Society has always had it's storytellers.

When mankind was still living in small villages, actually little more than extended families, the shaman was the storyteller. Myths about where we came from; tales of heroes and their battles; legends of gods. All familiar stories, told by priests or gurus. We took these tales, and used them in our daily lives. They became guides, or perhaps simply hope for a better life. We vented out anger, fear and frustration and, through our identification with heroes in the myths, sought to triumph over our trials. Society has changed. The myths and their makers, have changed as well. Many of our storytellers are screenwriters, and we watch the new mythologies in movies and on television.

Some of us even get our myths from comic books.

They are common sense, truth, disguised as stories. They are universal dreams. They are told over and over, in all societies, in all languages. I suppose that's why some stories, wherever they appear and in whatever form, draw an emotional response from us.

I've always felt that was the reason **Elfquest** has such an enormously faithful following. It's what Byrne is doing, in re-establishing the "god myth" in **Superman**. It's also what I hope to support in **Renegade**. I didn't grow up with comics, but I **did** grow up reading everything I could lay my hands on. I hope to present to you as many different kinds of stories, and as many new interpretations of the myths of life as I can at **Renegade**. You won't go "ping" with all of them. No one does. I do hope you will take some of these new tellings of the universal stories, and enjoy them, making them a part of your collective memory.

The purpose, for me, working hard here at **Renegade**, is to provide an extended family for this new breed of shamans.

We need these stories even more in these times of nuclear fear, when it seems as if we have lost control of our own lives.

I hope that you will check out these new titles; find the new myths that strike a chord of response in you.

Desperately seeking Steve Lefkowitz!
Please contact Deni at **Renegade**.

Deni

TREE

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34
NOV

200
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MAX COLLINS and
TERRY BEATTY'S

Ms. TREE

"A Christmas
Tree"



Renegade
Press

Beatty

Ms. TREE

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and Terry Beatty

"RUNAWAY II"

Chapter Five



INVESTIGATING THE SUPPOSED
SUICIDE OF PORN QUEEN
CINDI DUZIT (REAL NAME:
BETTY EDEN), I'D BECOME
SIDETRACKED IN THE AFFAIRS
OF ANOTHER "TRIPLE-X"
STARLET, TRACEY LYNN -

WHAT'S THE IDEA OF LYING TO
ME, HARRY? YOU SAID YOU
DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING TO DO
WITH THE BLUE MOVIE BIZ -
NOW I FIND OUT YOU'RE
TRACEY LYNN'S FINANCIAL ANGEL
IN HER NEW FILM COMPANY!

HEY, GIMME
A BREAK!
THAT'S
TOP SECRET
STUFF!



"IT'S NOT HER I'M WORRIED ABOUT - SHE KNOWS WHAT I'M UP TO... SHE'LL GET A PIECE OF IT - THOUGH WITH HER CORPORATION THIS IS A DROP IN THE BUCKET."



BUT MR. C HIMSELF - HE'S A NASTY GUY - HE'S CAPABLE OF ABOUT ANYTHING.

WOULDN'T DOMINIQUE MUERTA PUT A STOP TO THAT?



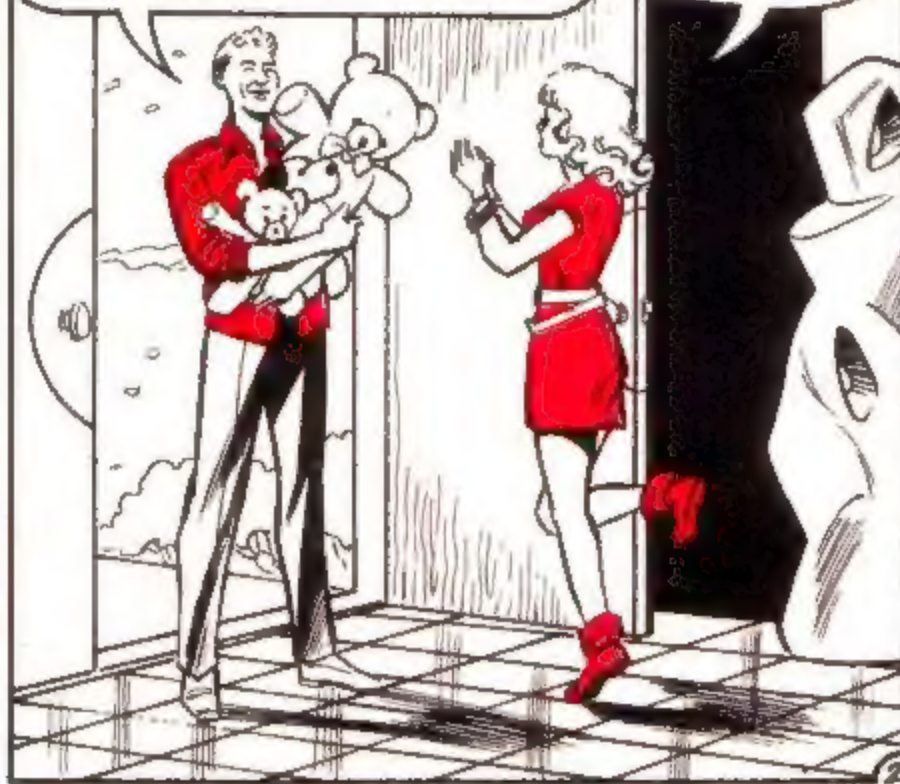
BUZZ!
BUZZ!

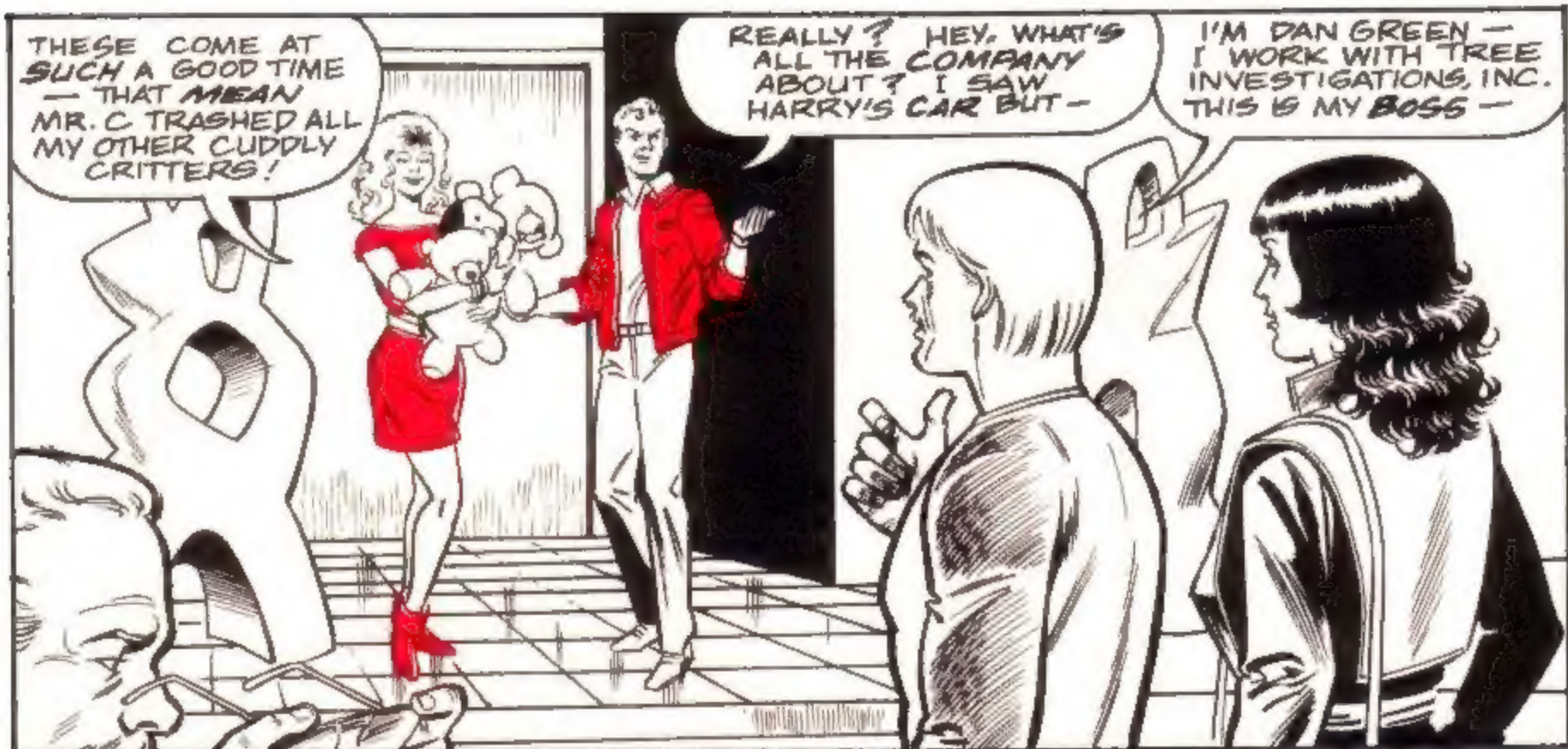
NO - SHE STAYS ALOOF FROM CRAP LIKE THIS ...LET "FREE ENTERPRISE TAKE ITS COURSE," SHE SAYS - THEN TAKES HER PIECE OF THE ACTION -



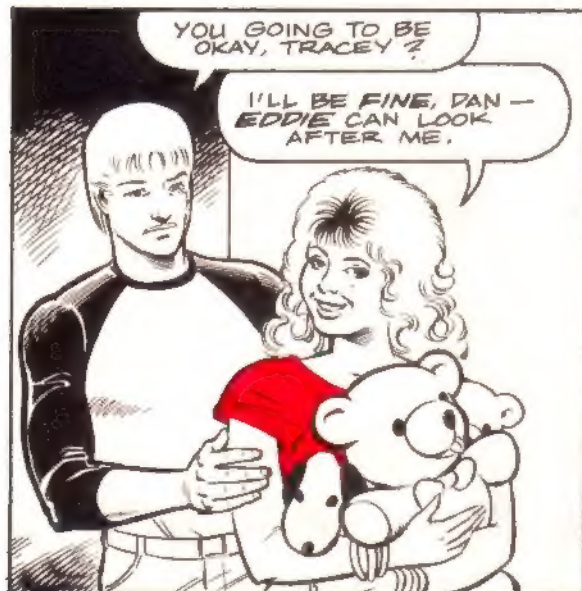
SORRY I COULDN'T GET THE DOOR MYSELF, BABY - TOO LOADED DOWN WITH GOODIES FOR YOU -

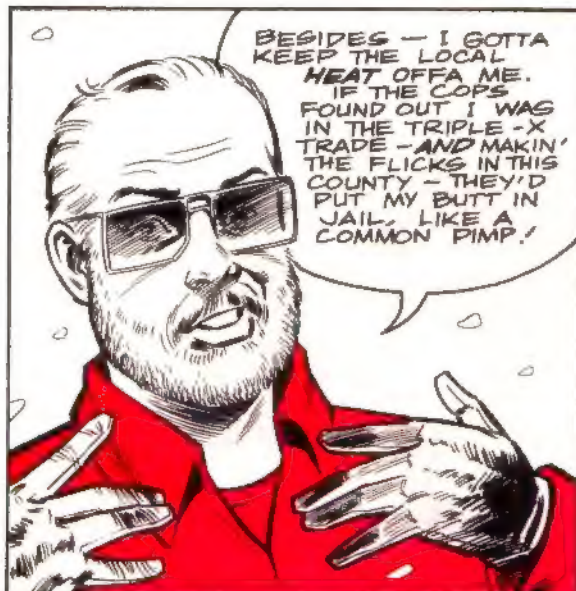
OH, EDDIE! YOU DREAMBOAT!











"I GOT ONE OF THE TOP 3 MEN'S MAGS IN THE COUNTRY - MY WHOLE OPERATION WOULD BE DIRTIED."



HOW CAN AN OPERATION LIKE YOURS GET "DIRTIED"?

IN THIS BLUENOSE REPRESSIVE ATMOSPHERE, ANYTHING'S POSSIBLE -



"SINCE THE MEESE COMMISSION'S REPORT ON PORN, I'VE LOST THOUSANDS OF OUTLETS FOR MY MAGAZINE SALES - RETAILERS ARE RUNNING SCARED - THEY DON'T WANNA BE BUSTED OR EVEN JUST BRANDED AS PORN MERCHANTS."



OKAY, OKAY, HARRY. I'LL KEEP YOUR SECRET TO MYSELF. I HAPPEN TO BELIEVE IN THE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS - EVEN IF IT DOES MEAN TOLERATING THE TASTELESS LIKES OF YOU.

YOU'RE OKAY, MS. TREE.

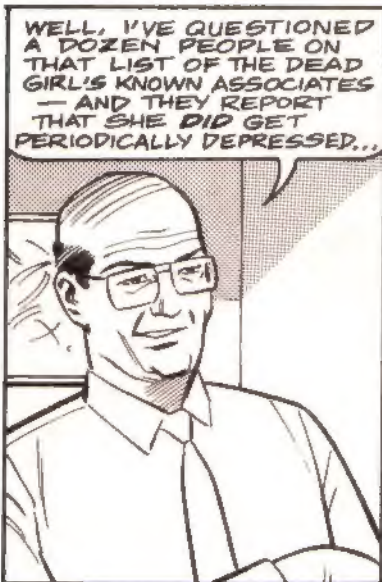


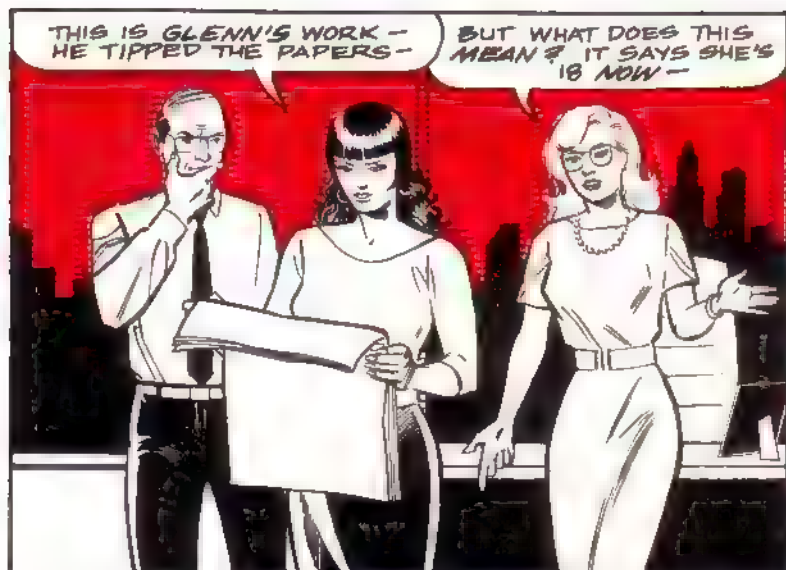
YOU KNOW, NO OFFENSE, BUT YOU REALLY ARE A CELEBRITY, AND A BABE TO BOOT. IF YOU'LL RECONSIDER AND DO THAT PHOTO SPREAD FOR ME, THERE'S TEN GEES IN IT FOR YOU -



WHAD I SAY?





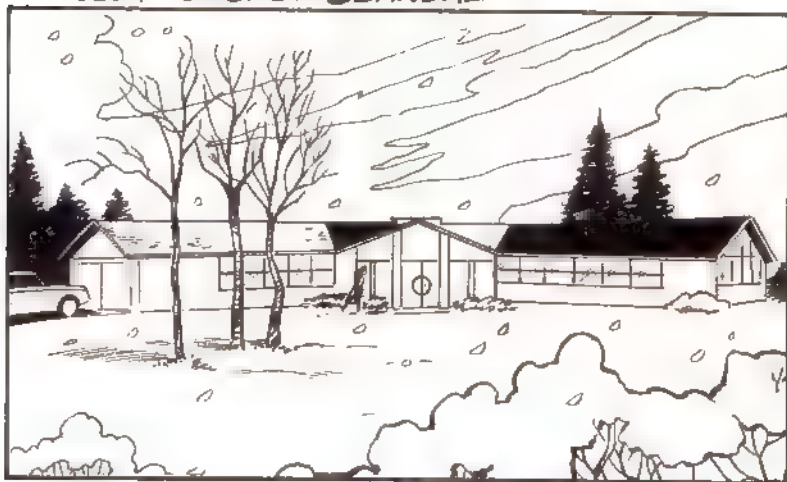




THAT'S JUST HOW GLENN PLANNED IT - HE THOUGHT THIS WOULD SHAME TRACEY OUT OF THE BUSINESS AND BACK INTO A MORE ACCEPTABLE LIFE STYLE -



I THOUGHT ABOUT LOOKING GLENN UP, AT HIS HOTEL, BUT WHAT WOULD BE THE POINT? INSTEAD, I HEADED BACK TO EDDIE GRAHAM'S, TO SEE HOW TRACEY WAS REACTING TO THE JUST-BROKEN SCANDAL -



DAN'S CAR WAS OUT FRONT, WHERE HE'D BEEN ON WATCH, BUT HE WASN'T IN IT. MAYBE EDDIE HAD SPLIT AND DAN WAS IN COMFORTING MISS UNDERAGE PORN STAR 1986 -



WELL, WELL - MS. TREE - COME IN - JOIN THE CHRISTMAS PARTY -



THE OTHER GUESTS ARE RIGHT IN HERE -



TO BE CONCLUDED THIS ISSUE -



Address all letters of
comment to

SWAK
P. O. BOX 1007
MUSCATINE, IA
52761

Dear Max,

The new MS TREE (#31) is nice, *real* nice. I especially like the first page to chapter six ("Dying Time"). Simple, but very effective. Terry's art is constantly improving and a joy to look at. Every issue seems better than the last.

Monte Beauchamp, CHICAGO, IL

Terry and I both recommend Monte's excellent fanzine *BLAB* which explores the connection between EC comics and the underground comix movement. Ask for it at your local comics shop, or send \$6.95 per copy to Monte Beauchamp, P.O. Box 25537, Chicago, IL 60625.

Dear M.A.C.,

As to the current storyline, MS TREE #29, chapters 1 & 2 of "The Other Cheek"), I don't believe, after giving it some thought, that Ms. Tree was forced to take medication. I do believe that psychiatrists are reasonable individuals who, if the hospital patient expresses a desire to under-go chemical-free therapy, and behaves in a manner characterized by neither violent outbursts nor suicidal episodes, (her self-defense injection of the poison into the neck of the woman who was trying to kill her, as recorded in Ms. Tree #27, would, I believe, be conceded by any fair thinking psychiatric professional to be a rational act), would work with the patient on that basis. (The misconception that medication is automatic stems from the consequences of overcrowding in understaffed public facilities where patients see their doctor infrequently.)

When I read T.M. Maple's comment that Ms. Tree chooses not to get drawn into a substantial personal change by the deeper aspects of the game of psychiatry, (and if MS TREE #29 was any indication, to be so drawn is precisely what she has chosen), I had to agree that this was her attitude going in, but with the qualification that the reason that this was her attitude was because her firmness of both moral conviction and sense of personal identity saw no need of substantial personal change. The question then becomes, "Were her moral convictions right and was her firm sense of personal identity healthy?"

If Ms. Tree's apparent personality change was not a scam, (it didn't appear to be), then it's Ms. Tree, the drugs, and the indoctrination by the shrink and staff to twist her own good impulses into a perverted mockery; and I conclude she voluntarily undertook medication-assisted therapy - out of a desire to play the game, a sincere desire to improve herself, and without a clear understanding of the potential moral consequences.

T.M.'s notion is that Ms. Tree is closed-minded and closed-hearted simply because she has an extraordinarily clear-minded and strong-hearted sense of what's right and what's wrong. T.M. didn't come across too clearly on this. T.M.'s letter seemed to convey the idea that Ms. Tree allows herself no room for spiritual growth and advancement. Booshwa!

Ms. Tree's moral sense is in excellent health and she has not been spiritually stagnant. In her personal relationships she has shown forth a sincere struggle to work on correcting her deficiencies, (e.g. with her step-son) and achieve positive growth in being sensitive to and caring of others, (e.g., of Pete Anger). That she chose to work things through in her daily life indicates emotional courage, and she exhibits vulnerability and emotional openness in allowing the asylum to so pervert her, as it appears to have done.

David Malcolm Porta, SACTO

Max, Terry, and Gary,

So this is what Michael Tree has become after her trip to the

hospital, huh? No more guns, no more aggressiveness, no more sharp edges - and as a result, perhaps no more Michael Tree. I must admit, this is not at all what I expected from the fiery, violent detective. I never imagined she would even take the doctors seriously, let alone alter her entire persona. She seemed too hard, too tough to ever twist or budge, too sure of herself and the justice of her actions. However, I guess that the grinder she's been through over the past few years is enough to erode even the most powerful and confident person.

"The Other Cheek," in MS TREE #29, was a very strange new chapter in Michael's life, presenting a woman who has been so totally changed, that aside from the physical resemblance, she's unrecognizable as the heroine of past issues. Boy, you guys really take chances in this series, you present graphic violence, provocative themes involving issues like abortion and child molestation, and you completely rearrange the identity of your main character. Not many comic creators could pull one of these tactics off, let alone all three - but you people manage, and you do it well. In other words, even though I'm sure the change in Michael is not permanent, I'm glad you took the opportunity to show another side of her personality.

And yes, the Michael of "The Other Cheek" is definitely another side of the Michael of, say, "Runaway." Though we haven't seen this part dominant before, I know it was always within the character. Beneath all her tough, suspicious, angry, cunning armor, Michael is tender, sensitive, caring, and non-aggressive. That peaceful center has always been with her, though it has been badly shaken and submerged by all the horrible experiences of her life - the murder of her husband, the murder of friends, the animalistic struggle to protect herself from Muerta and so many others. Michael had to bury her peaceful, caring feelings under layers and layers of fury and paranoia, in order to survive the gauntlet she's been running. Without that inner core, though, she also would have perished, she would have ultimately descended to Muerta's level of cruelty and vengeance, with absolutely no sense of respect for any human life, no redeeming goodness or emotion of any kind. She would have become a simple, cold, bitter killing mechanism, abandoning all principles and sanity; then, she would have truly belonged in the looney bin, and she would have probably stayed there all her life. When Michael was placed in the sanitarium, moved to an environment where she was guaranteed protection (after dealing with the evil guards) and encouraged to feel placid and sensitive, the hidden core of feeling came to the surface, and with treatment by the doctors and, apparently, tranquilizers, it became dominant. I don't think she could have been changed so quickly and drastically without exploiting the fundamental decency she possessed, the sympathetic core, the intense desire for peace and non-violence.

Before her trip to the hospital, Michael killed, but she did not kill for pleasure or personal gain. She didn't rub folks out for a cheap, sadistic thrill, unlike many of those she did in - she killed to survive, to protect herself and her loved ones from being killed themselves. Her basic motivation, then, was valid, and anchored in her decent and peace-loving spirit. As she said herself, on page 5 of this issue, "I've tried to use violence to reshape the world, to make it a better, more sane place."

And so, it was only natural that Michael would change in such an extreme way when stuck in the sanitarium. Though many readers might consider her sudden personality switch to be impossible and unrealistic, I feel it was actually logical, perhaps even inevitable. I think Michael came to love her vacation from reality, it gave her what she really wanted, all along, deep inside - complete seclusion, peace, and escape. She finally had a chance to let her guard down, to feel like a caring, worthwhile individual instead of a hounded killer. As Dan perceptively points out, "But I'm not so sure she wouldn't like to stay. This place is safe from the real, cruel world - she's taking her

sweet time, saying her goodbyes" In a way, being sent to the hospital was the best thing that could have happened to Michael, resulting in a rediscovery of her emotional, tranquil self; of course, it might get her killed, if she doesn't soon realize that her emotions should temper, not replace, her strength and aggressiveness. Now that she's out, of course, Michael wants more than anything to continue her escape, to extend her vacation into the real world of violence and hatred. I'm sure that the obacenity and evil which have already begun to attack her once again, will restore her judgment and ability to defend herself

I'm really enjoying the current storyline, and I liked "The Other Cheek" a lot. It's all providing a unique, heretofore unrevealed glimpses into the mind and motivation of Ms. Tree, and is also bringing up some interesting questions about violence and rehabilitation. I'm really not sure what you're trying to say with some of these points, for instance, do you really believe that psychiatric treatment has no value in society, and that "rehabilitation" does more harm than good? That seems to be a focus of this whole plotline. I think I understand the viewpoint you're following toward violence — that violence is wrong, but the world is a violent place, and we need to use violent means to survive. What about Mike Jr.'s blowing away the two thugs, though — and enjoying it? He did it in self-defense, but also got a real kick from it... and the scene was almost played in a glorifying way. What's your point, guys? I'm curious about how you intended it to come off.

Oh well, I can't wait to see where it all leads next issue. Keep up the good stuff.

Robert T. Jeschonek, JOHNSTON, PA

Robert, I can't answer your final questions because I think it opens a dangerous door (one which I admittedly go through from time to time): that is, the author explaining/interpreting his own work. It's up to the work itself to provoke and inspire valid and insightful interpretations - and your reading of Ms. Tree's character as it has changed and developed, as you explore it in this letter, is perhaps the best and most on-target the author (which is to say, me) has yet encountered. Thank you.

Dear Max and Terry,

If I hadn't seen the ad for it just all over the place (this issue seemed to have wider publicity than most previous ones, for some reason) then I would've been pretty surprised by the turn of events in #29. I felt for sure that Michael would weather her stay in the hospital and emerge just as determined and gun happy as ever. Instead, she is a greatly changed person.

I think that the triumph of the psychiatrists over her, if I may put it in those terms, pivoted on the early but crucial victory of simply getting her to play the "game" of treatment. She really had no choice, I guess. In order to get released she had to undergo treatment. At first, she was determined to engage in it only superficially and only to secure her departure. But it was the only game in town, so to speak, and I can see how it would quickly come to dominate her life. From there, it is but a short step to her wholehearted participation in the process — no longer just a game.

Of course, in some (many?) ways, she needed treatment, or at least some way of changing certain facets of her life. Her protestations that death followed her instead of vice versa was less and less believable as time went on. She had to embrace reality — either admit her killing ways as a part of the life she had chosen or draw away from it as she sometimes said she wanted to.

At times while reading #30, I began to wonder about the likelihood of the situation portrayed therein, specifically about the change in Ms. Tree herself. She has gone from being a hardnosed killer to being an unrealistically pacifistic dummy. This seems an incredible leap to take. In favour of this transformation is the fact that people who live at one extreme often jump to the other, without pausing to stand on any middle ground and, of course, that a stay in a mental institution can very definitely cause tremendous shifts in behaviour and outlook. Yet I couldn't help getting the feeling that she was acting much too unbelievably, that she was ignoring events around her, rather than "merely" putting a special interpretation on events perceived. (Mind you, self-delusion is not known in human beings!) I get the feeling, Max, that you were maybe overstating the case in order to make her eventual re-adoption of violent means seem that much more justifiable. This would be understandable, since the justice, even desirability, of violence in a good cause is essential to comic book

adventure. Also, I'm sure you have something up your sleeve yet in Ms. Tree's struggle with violence.

Let me assure reader Kiril Kundurazieff that despite having a few letters printed in various comics over the years, I have yet to experience boredom at seeing one in print! And Max, when you say that readers are "trying to read things into" the current storyline and that you "aren't trying to make a statement," let me just say that all of an author's symbolism and meaning is not necessarily conscious on his part. And say, with reference to your reply to Chris Romano's letter is "hooters" really more "dignified" than "boobs"?!

T. M. Maple, WESTON, ONTARIO

T. M., the pendulum has not swung all the way back for Ms. Tree. Yes, she's her tough, occasionally vengeful self again - but I think she has learned something about the ramifications of her most extreme behavior. But what she - and Terry and I, and the readers - have also learned in "The Other Cheek" is that you can't go back: Karma being what it is, Ms. Tree has set too much in motion to become a pacifist at this point. (See, I said I can't resist going through the interpretation door now and then.) By the way, I readily cop to "overstating the case" - MS. TREE is a melodramatic, comic-book adventure and (as I've pointed out before) only seems realistic compared to most of what else is being done in the medium. I agree, too, that the fiction writer's symbolism and meaning is not always conscious on his part. For example, now that I look back at a dozen or so years of professional fiction-writing, I can see recurring themes in my work that I did not realize were there. As for my "hooters" remark, that was conscious, T. M. - "hooters" is actually more undignified than "boobs," which is the joke. Get it? Get it? T. M.? You're still out there, aren't you? I know you are... I can hear you typing...

Dear Max, Terry, Gary & Dani,

The sedate, the sedated, Ms. Tree's a softer, more rounded figure of a person: her every feature, expression more open, more calm — a substantial achievement of pen and pencil!

I'm tired of all the abortion "controversy" — I've chosen my side (that of massive, early education about sexuality, sensuality, economics and responsibility...and guilt-free cost-free hazards-free contraception) — especially because with "The Other Cheek" you're bringing to light an equally, possibly more important issue I fear will provoke far fewer misadventures: the effect our 'be all you can be' destructo-robot world is producing in our children. So whatta you think? Is Mike Jr. going to get a chance to outgrow his (ahem) male adolescent power fantasies (bang bang shoot shoot) or will he become a green beret statistic cliché? I've played with guns as a kid, and, now, know my pistol of choice is a Colt Python, but I'm not a 'shooter'. Mike Jr. is. Isn't he — what's it gonna be like, now, for him, to watch the Sonny/Davy Crocketts on tv?

Lemme quickly add that everyone's reactions to Ms. Tree's 'cure' (Mike's, Dan's — that "everyone's") kinda points out a detrimental lack of a balance of friends in Michael's life. Possible that's a dangerous lack. And finally: the cover to "The Other Cheek", MS. TREE #29 goes into m'files as among my favorites!

Matthew-Louis Levin, NORTH HAMPTON, MA

I'm not sure I understand that "destructo-robot" issue you raise, but then I just got back from seeing the film "Blue Velvet" and I'm a little brain-fried from the experience. I, too, am a bit tired of the abortion controversy, but only in terms of this letters page, because said controversy is no longer a central concern of a recent MS. TREE story. Nonetheless, I'm running one more letter on that subject, because it's interesting...but that's it, gang. And enough already on the logic discussions, okay? Or should that be, "Nuff said?"

Dear Max and Terry,

It is my firm belief that the letters pages of MS. TREE are the most lucid, intelligent, well-thought letters in all of comics, and if this letter sees print, I shall be honored to be in the company of all these who seem to spend so much time and effort on their missives to these pages. Publication, however, is not the point of this letter, and should you wish to remove this entire paragraph, I would fully understand.

I am writing because I wish to take issue with a point raised by Russel Shaddox in the pages of MS. TREE #29.

Mr. Shaddox states, "anyone who can equate the life of an

unborn fetus to that of a woman with an already-established life, a complement of life's experiences, is operating with an awfully warped sense of logic "If I read Mr Shaddox correctly, he is trying to convince us that a woman has a right to abort an unwanted child simply because she is more experienced than the child is.

Now I don't know diddysquat about associative or deductive logic, but I do know that to assert that one person's life is more meaningful or valuable than another's because of some difference in age or experience is pure poppycock.

Is my daughter's life of less value than mine because I have a "fully developed life"? (And even if you believe so, try telling that to my ex-wife) Or is my brother's life more important than mine because he has a wider range of life's experiences? If I am to apply the reasoning behind Mr. Shaddox's argument then I must conclude in the affirmative. However, if ever given the undesirable situation of choosing between a continuation of my daughter's life or my own, or a continuation of my daughter's life even though it would adversely affect mine, I hope I would have the good sense not to even consider Mr Shaddox's argument.

Although abortion has become a clear-cut issue in my personal life, I recognize that it is not one for most people. But it is not logic of "terminating a life is murder, abortion is terminating a life, therefore abortion is murder," which I find to be oversimplistic. In fact, my view of the drawback there is not with the logic or simplicity at all, but with the definition of the "terminating a life is murder" clause.

Abortion is terminating a life. Terminating a life, especially in the eyes of the law, is not always the same as murder. State executions of criminals and acts of violence in self-defense which result in a loss of human life come readily to mind as terminations of life which are not murder. To that extent, as Mr Shaddox reminds us, "the woman who carries an unborn child has a responsibility not to take that life lightly." All too often, lives are taken lightly. To insist that the life of an unborn child is somehow less worthy of continuation than that of the woman who bears the child is to take that life lightly. In that sense, Mr Shaddox has shirked the responsibility he has established himself. Unless, that is, he feels that only the mother of the child has a responsibility not to take that life lightly.

Abortion is taking a life. Sometimes, taking a life is murder. Sometimes, abortion is murder. I am not about to tell a mentally retarded, thirteen year-old rape victim, who is pregnant and under extreme pressure (admittedly an extreme example, but one which has occurred) that aborting her child is murder. She is not taking that life lightly. Her other troubles are likely to be causing more than enough trauma as it is and her pregnancy is likely to be best dealt with as quickly as possible.

On the other hand, I will readily tell a married, secure, healthy woman that aborting the child she is carrying simply because she doesn't want a third one (or some such) is murder. "The woman who carries an unborn child has a responsibility not to take that life lightly."

I have rambled far too long. I hope somewhere amid all this I have adequately expressed my view. I hope also I have made my point with regard to Mr. Shaddox's argument. And although I may not agree with all I read, I thank you for printing it. After all, it did move me both to consider the issue once again and to take the time myself to put my opinions on paper. Again, thank you very much.

David A. Smith, BRISTOL, TN

Dear Max,

This is certainly a new change of pace for Ms. Tree. I never thought Ms. Tree's "rehabilitation" would do anything - and certainly not work to this extent. Of course, I did know something was going to happen when, in issue 25, Ms. Tree said we was willing to take drugs from the doctor. And, since she is still taking these drugs now that she's out of the "nuthouse," I don't think she'll revert back until someone, hopefully Dan, gets rid of those pills.

It's obvious that since Ms. Tree is now docile, a lot of bad things are going to go down. It was her thirst for vengeance that helped keep the gangsters in line and the lives of her friends safe. This new Ms. Tree is a big step up for any of the remaining mobs that might seek vengeance. Already, as we saw in this issue, she won't even defend herself. It's going to be interesting.

I can't help but think about the fate of Dr. Syke. If this new attitude brings injury to anyone she loves, and if she reverts back to her old, lovable, blood thirsty self, Dr. Syke is going to be up shit's creek without that well needed proverbial paddle.

The next few issues are going to be interesting. Take care.

Chris Romano, PACIFIC PAUSADES, CA

We may not have seen the last of Dr. Syke. But don't look for Ms. Tree to take revenge upon him; she's smart enough to know Syke did his best to help her - and he did, in fact, give her some help.

Dear Terry and Max,

There are comics I read with a passing interest. You know the ones. They are comics you've read for years and you just sort of absently keep track of what is going on. But MS. TREE just keeps getting better every issue, so even if I buy 12 comics the same day I buy MS. TREE I have to read MS. TREE first. Of all the comics I buy, this is the one I look forward to reading most.

Now MS. TREE is facing the consequences of her violent life and how it is affecting those close to her.

Or is she?

Instead of using this period to reevaluate her life, to weigh once and for all what her "get-tough" attitude costs those closest to her, MS. TREE is now a pill popping Barbie doll drifting through her own comic like smoke drifting through a Van Halen Concert. Too bad.

Too bad that instead of MS. TREE gathering some insight from her psychiatric experiences all she learned was popping pills. The past few issues have seemed to suggest that there is only being violent or being passive and no acceptable middleground. It would be nice to see her balanced instead of going full tilt bogle in one extreme or the other. I guess obsession with her work is as much a part of her personality as it is for such classic characters as the Shadow, Batman, and Travis McGee. Deciding how to walk the line between obsession and humanity makes for a more multi-dimensional character. You are skillful enough to write her that way. She doesn't have to be either/or, she can be both aggressive and happy.

On another note: I have the first two QUARRY books you wrote (Max wrote. Sorry Terry. I'll write and compliment you on the PHONY PAGES later) but I can't find the other books. It says in the front cover of QUARRY'S LIST that QUARRY'S DEAL and QUARRY'S CUT are "forthcoming." Are they available by sending money to FOUL PLAY PRESS, or can I order them directly from you? Please let me know soon because QUARRY'S LIST ends where the story I want to read begins.

T.E. Pouncey, WICHITA, KS

I think it's obvious by now that Ms. Tree is, these days, better adjusted than she used to be. Don't look for her to be at all passive, however - and a relapse is always possible. And thanks for plugging my Quarry novels, all four of which are in print and fairly readily available at major bookstore chains as well as mystery book stores. I'm sure you could order them from Foul Play Press, but the handiest thing for anyone interested in my novels to do is order them from regular advertiser Bob Weinberg, who has all the Quarries and more. The first new Quarry in ten years, by the way, will be the next book I do (I'm finishing up Heller #4 at the moment); tentatively titled QUARRY'S RETURN, it will be a hardcover next year from Foul Play Press.

Dear Max and Terry,

I've been meaning to get a letter off to you since my friend Jeff started me on Ms. Tree back around the time of "Baby Boom." Since then, I've picked up issues 1 - 12 or so and have kept up with the current series. Obviously I like the book.

I think the most interesting aspect of the book is that it is built on a literary base rather than the art. That is, the artwork is stylized, clearly telling the story without adding a lot of unnecessary embellishment. Even in action sequences, like pages 5-6 of "Time To Take Your Medicine," Terry does without the visual pyrotechnics that most artists would indulge in. Similarly, the use of stats in the frequent "flashback" panels preserves the integrity of the story while with new artwork Terry might be tempted to add some new element or simply screw up.

I'm trying to avoid saying that the artwork takes a back seat

to the story, because I enjoy Terry's work quite a bit. It seems more that he feels a responsibility to the story rather than showing how well he can draw someone leaping ten feet across a room to throw a punch. Also, his restraint makes it easier to believe in the characters as real people. A similar comparison can be made in the artwork for Alan Moore's **SWAMP THING** and **WATCHMEN**.

The fantastic elements in **SWAMP THING** make it a natural for the bizarre artwork and unusual panel arrangements of Veitch and Bisette. In **WATCHMEN**, on the other hand, Gibbons' static panel arrangement and realistic detail make it easier to believe it as a realistic interpolation of "our" world.

In terms of the Duo-Tone artwork, yes and no. I like it, but not if you're going to use pastel colors like the blue in issue 31. With a light tone, there's more of a tendency to overuse the color and to use it for rendering (eg. Ms. Tree's face, Pg. 8 Panel 3 of *Take Your Medicine*). I'd prefer to see the deeper tones used on the first page of the story.

To contradict everything I've said, I like the symbolic covers (eg #29) as much as the one's that show an actual scene of the story.

Ms. Tree seems to be the only detective in comics or TV (excepting Nathaniel Dusk, maybe) that doesn't wisecrack her way through an investigation. But Max, are we ever going to see her take on an actual paying client?

A quick note to let Terry know how much I enjoyed "The Phony Pages." This kind of parody is certainly funnier than "funny animal" mutants whose adventures are only slightly less serious than the subjects of the parody.

Marty Golia, HARTSDALE, NY

Marty, Ms. Tree has a paying client in the current story, but she's had 'em before. Hasn't she? What do I know, I just write the damn strip. but I do know one thing you're absolutely right about Terry's brilliant PHONY PAGES, for which I can take no credit except for nudging him for literally years to put collections of that great material together. Hell, even the COMICS JOURNAL gave him a rave

Dear Respondent,

Re **MS. TREE** #30: Ms. Tree has become a junkie! I am disgusted by this.

How could it have happened? Does she have an addictive personality? Is it the case that she was previously addicted to meting out justice, and has replaced that addiction with another in becoming a prescription junkie?

Hadn't she been under tremendous emotional pressure as a consequence of the syndicate's and the authorities' persecution of her (persecution due to her single-handed war against evil, another emotional burden)? Didn't she become a pill-popper as part of a therapeutic program to deal with her problems?

How could Ms. Tree become a junkie? It's horrid! To succumb to this pill-popping addiction indicates a severe character flaw, (inconsistent with her history), a weakness that could ultimately destroy her life. I am aghast! I am outraged!

Ms. Tree has always been presented as being extremely resourceful. She has proven her propensity to keep her wits about her in the face of adversity. This propensity to keep her wits about her is the key to what's so outrageous about her extreme personality change: drug addiction is simply too inconsistent with the ground work which has been laid.

Doesn't Ms. Tree direct her behavior from an extremely strong sense of right and wrong? It is irrational that she allow her moral sense, her sense of justice, to be so suppressed, and suppressed it is — by those pills, to which she has become addicted.

Have these pills given her amnesia? Has she forgotten the moral logic which leads her to take positive action in the face of extraordinary circumstances? Moreover, her moral logic has always involved the element of compassion, compassion for the victim, no matter how hard the justice she metes out may be.

Wasn't it compassion for Claude, her fellow patient, that motivated her initiating the investigation of Senator Palma? In panel 8 on page 9 of *Sitdown*, (chapter four of "The Other Cheek"), one witness against the Senator, a Mr. Backer, has just been murdered. In panel 3 on page 7 of the previous chapter, "The Killing Line", Roger asserts that he's got eye-witnesses, plural — other than Claude, who saw Palma with his secretary the night she was killed. So, we know that at least

one person other than Claude and the late Mr. Backer remains who has come forward (Claude actually ~~saw~~ the murder).

Will Ms. Tree allow ~~these~~ witnesses to die also? Have these pills, and her addiction to them, so robbed her of compassion that she's willing to close her eyes as the bodies pile up? (Of course not, if they hype page for the as yet unreleased **MS. TREE** #31 is true. "It's back to normal" as Ms. Tree flushes her psychiatric cure down the drain, and picks up her gun to avenge the death of an innocent." Not Claude, I hope.)

What I just wrote about compassion goes equally for self preservation, (defense), but compassion is more altruistic, so it makes a better sounding pitch. Nevertheless, self defense has been a big motive in her behavior; and one torpedo ~~did~~ almost off her, except Effie blew his brain out, and Ms. Muerta ~~did~~ threaten Ms. Tree's life right on the comic's last page. (Did the pills so distort her perceptions — i.e., she's failing to keep her wits about her — that she's willing to close her eyes to the threat to her life?)

To Tom Crunkleton of Atlanta, GA, who answers me with the claim that legislation "shouldn't" condemn immorality, nor enforce morality, I say two things.

First: just recently the honorable justices of our Supreme Court have upheld, and rightly so, in a case originating in Atlanta, that very principle of law which I had endorsed, and which provoked Tom Crunkleton's response. A righteous blow against moral anarchy, perversion and evil.

Second: isn't his "shouldn't" a categorical imperative, as was mine, against which he writes, (the main difference being that mine is right and his isn't)? Doesn't his saying that law "shouldn't" enforce "shouldn't's" constitute the setting up of a standard precisely equivalent, (except that his is wrong), to the type of standard, (law), which he purports to be opposing? Isn't it true that his own logic defeats itself?

The price hike of the **MS. TREE** comic! Hey, give yourself a raise and while you're at it, take the rest of the day off, why don'tcha?

Effie's character is developing nicely, Ms. Muerta's, too, and Ms. Tree's hooters.

The art was typically okay by me. The coloring, too. Kudos, all.

David Malcolm Porta, SACRAMENTO, CA

I don't think Ms. Tree was ever a "junkie," David - and I think that the issue #31 should have answered any of your other problems. I'd go into more detail, but I'm about to give myself the rest of the day off, to contemplate hooters. ..

Dear Max & Terry,

Greetings and felicitations. I just read **MS. TREE** #31, and was quite surprised by an error made in the **MIKE MIST MINUTE MYSTERY**. Mike arrested the subject for claiming that she was using an automated teller machine to cash a check. Mike stated that ATMs cannot cash checks. **WRONG folks!!!** ATMs can and do cash checks, depending on the software & ATM involved. **CITIBANK** in NYC allows instant credit for deposits made through ATMs, when a person has such privileges. Although the amounts below the nearest \$20 cannot be accessed (**CITIBANK** ATMs only deal in 10s & 20s starting at \$20) most of the funds are available that instant after the deposit. Also, many people deposit checks, and draw on cash already cleared. Although not technically correct to call it "cashing a check," that is how it's often referred to. Also **DOLLAR DRY DOCK** here in NYC has a new machine that will allow you to remove cash in exact amounts. I am sure that NYC is not the only place that has such ATMs. In the future, please try to verify facts before presenting them as solutions to a problem. Please also try to make the **MINUTE MYSTERIES** not rely on minor slips of the tongue that may actually be just improper ways of referring to things.

Mark Marmor, NY NY

*Thanks for writing, Mark. This is Barb, Max's wife. And since I gave Max the idea for this **MIKE MIST**, he asked me if I'd like to answer your letter. (Actually he threw it in my face and said "WELL??")*

I know ATMs offer a few more services since I helped install them in our local bank, but until they can verify that the date of the check is current, the amount correctly written out, the funds available if other than a personal check, and the check properly signed and endorsed, ATMs will NEVER be able to "cash a check."



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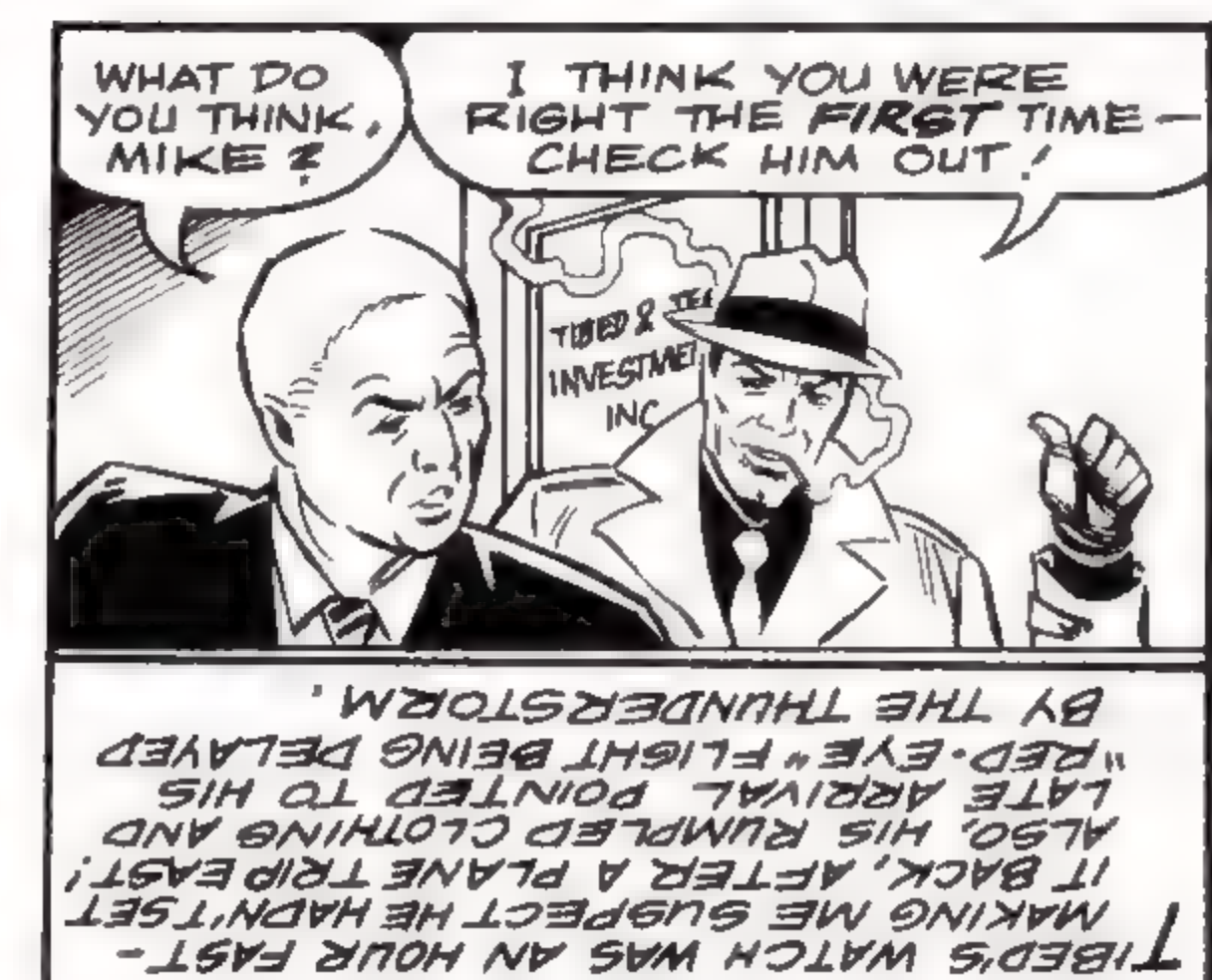
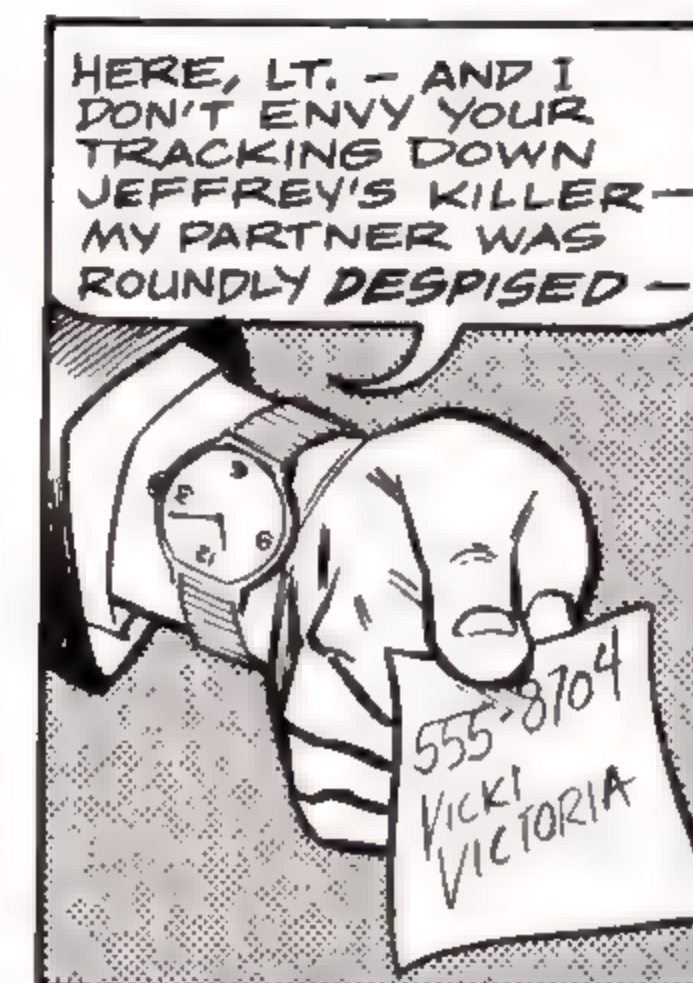
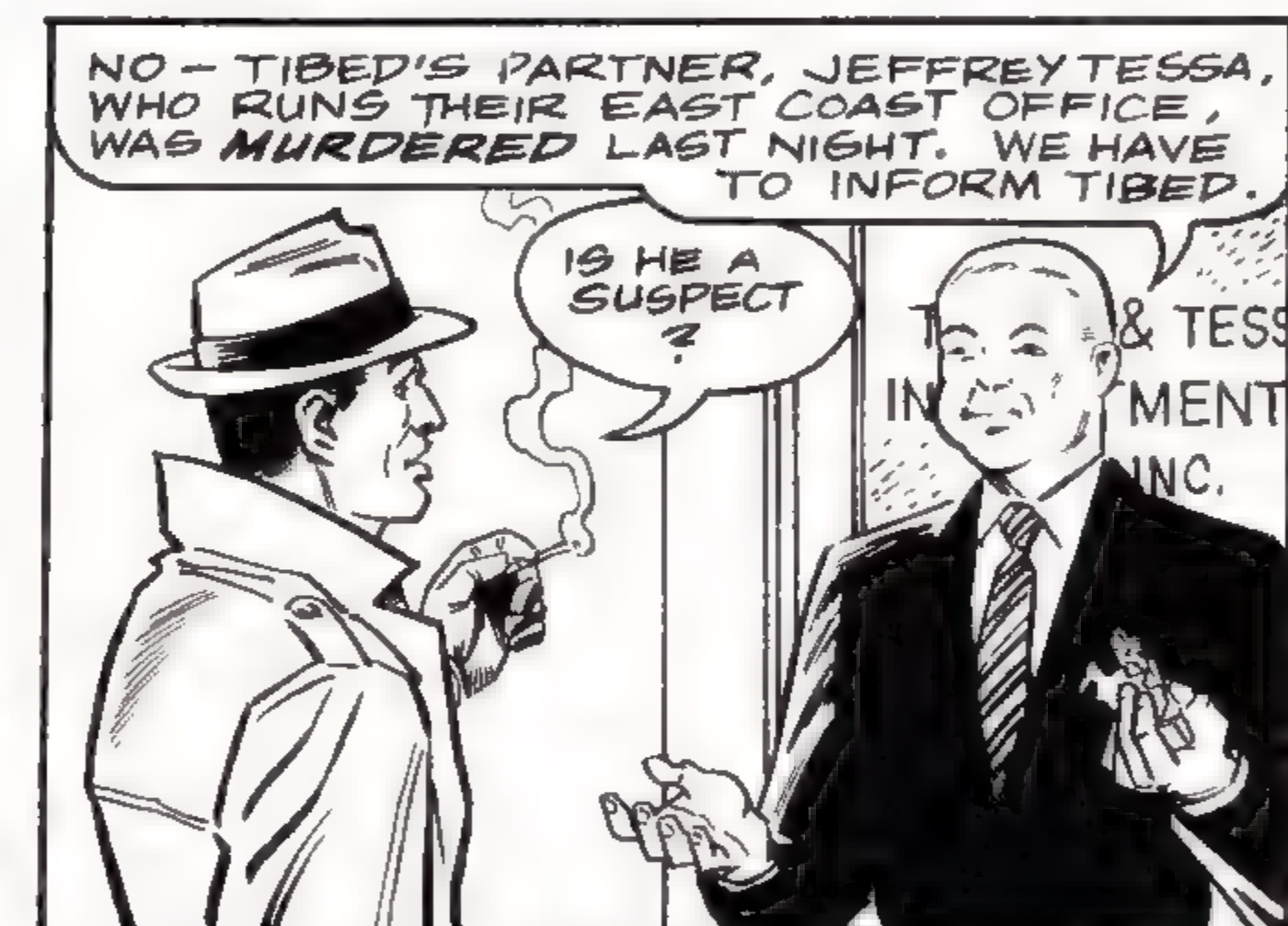
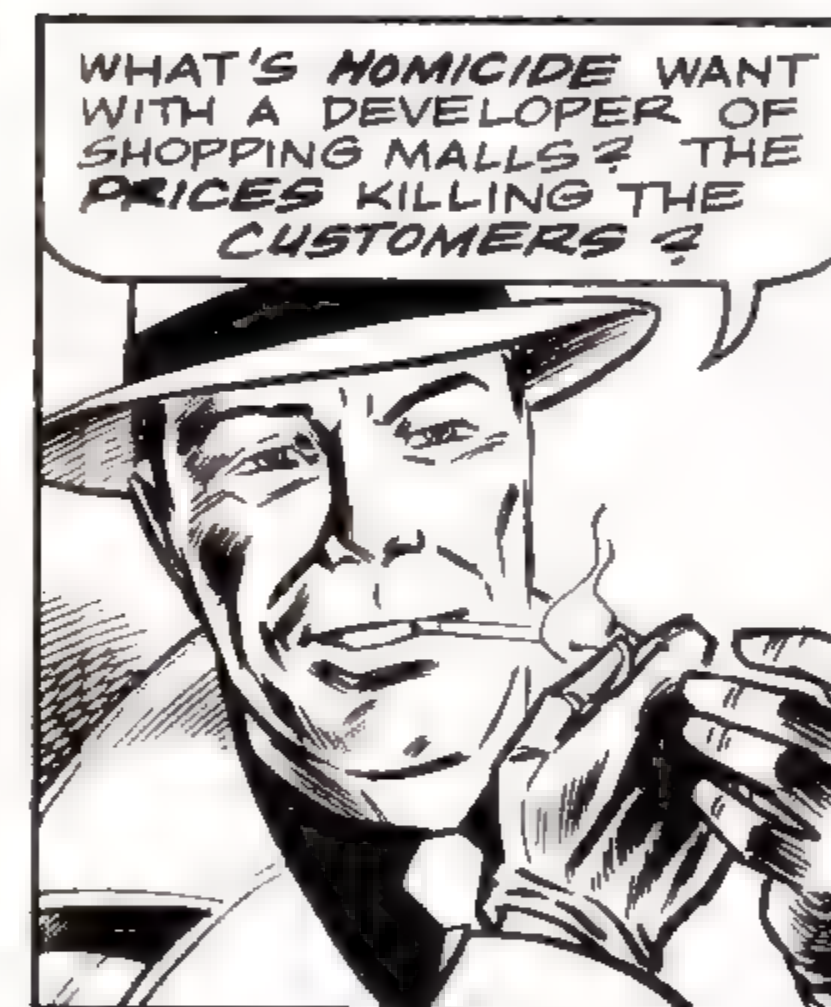
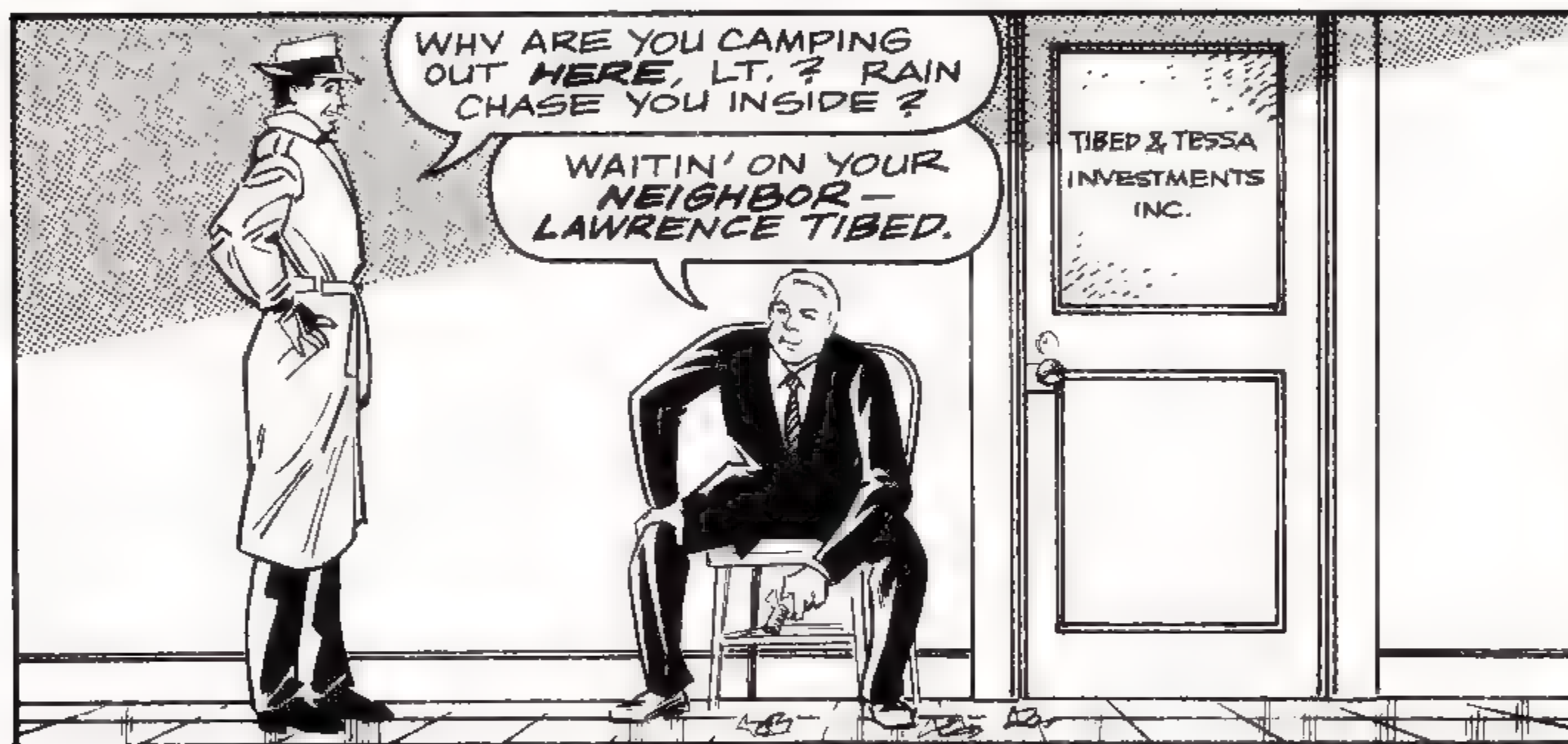
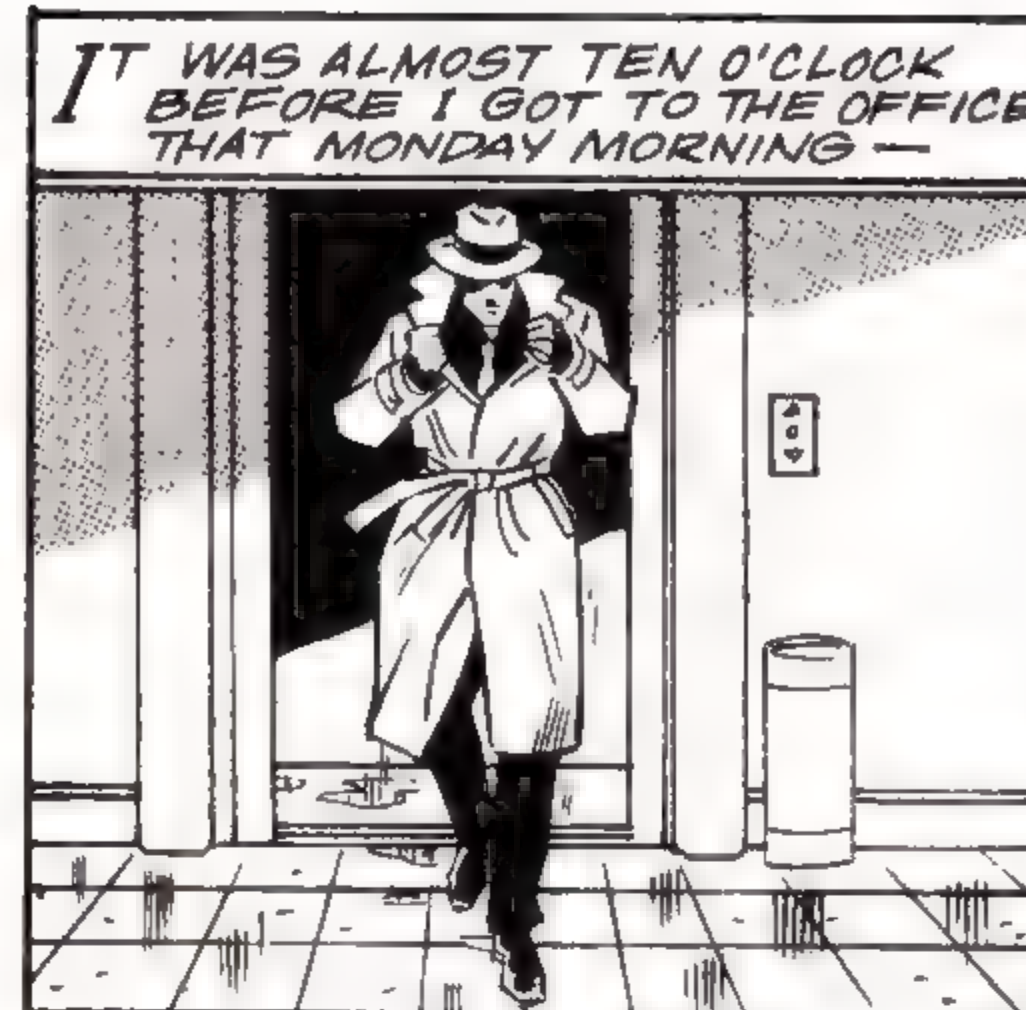
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Ms. TREE

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"RUNAWAY II"

Chapter Six

ALL THROUGH THE HOUSE



JOIN THE CHRISTMAS PARTY,
THE PORN MOGUL HAD SAID.
BUT I DON'T THINK HE TRUSTED
ME TO MAINTAIN PROPER
DECORUM. "MR. C" AND
HIS MUSCLE-BOUND SHADOW,
"PEX," TOOK MY GUN AWAY
AND FOUND MAKESHIFT
MATERIALS TO PUT ME IN
MY PLACE.



AH - THE SOCIAL WORKER
HAS AN OPINION...
THE DO-GOODER WHO
SPILLED THE BEANS TO
THE PAPERS ABOUT POOR
LITTLE UNDERAGE TRACEY-



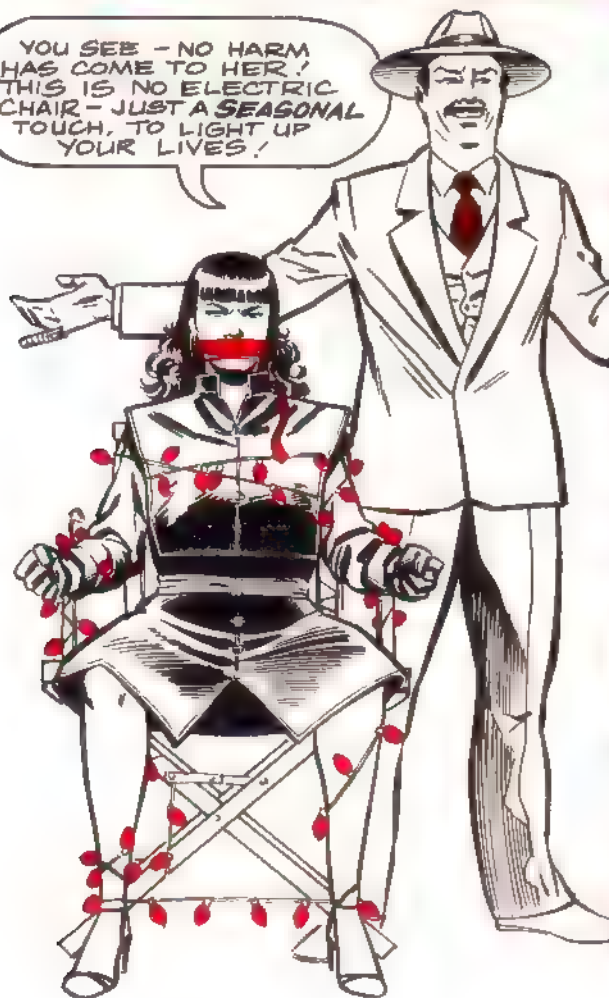
SOMEBODY
HAS TO TAKE A
STAND AGAINST
SLIME LIKE
YOU!



HE SOUNDS LIKE YOU,
DEAR - WHAT A NICE
CHRISTMAS SURPRISE
FOR YOU! SOMEONE TO
SPEAK ON YOUR BEHALF-

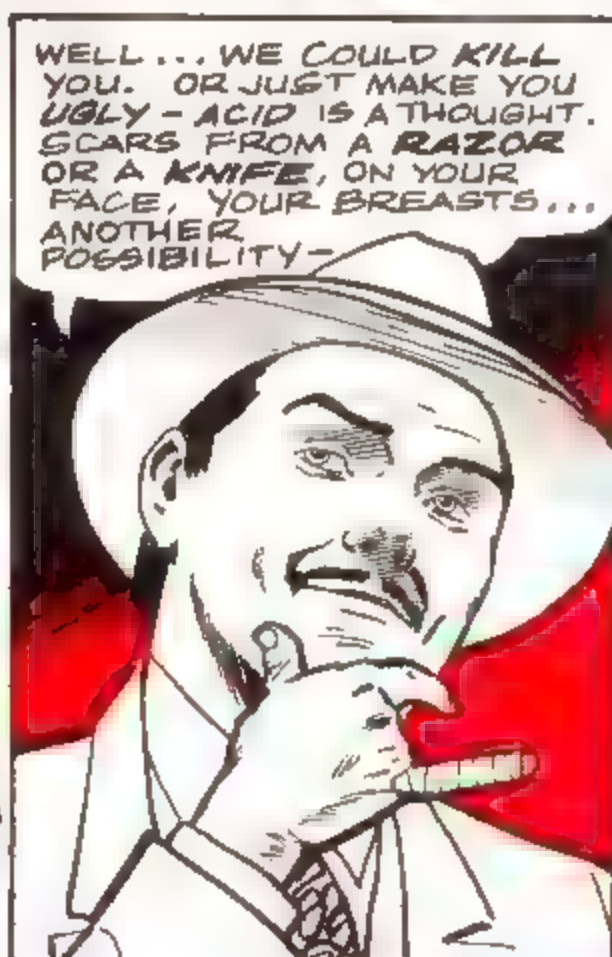
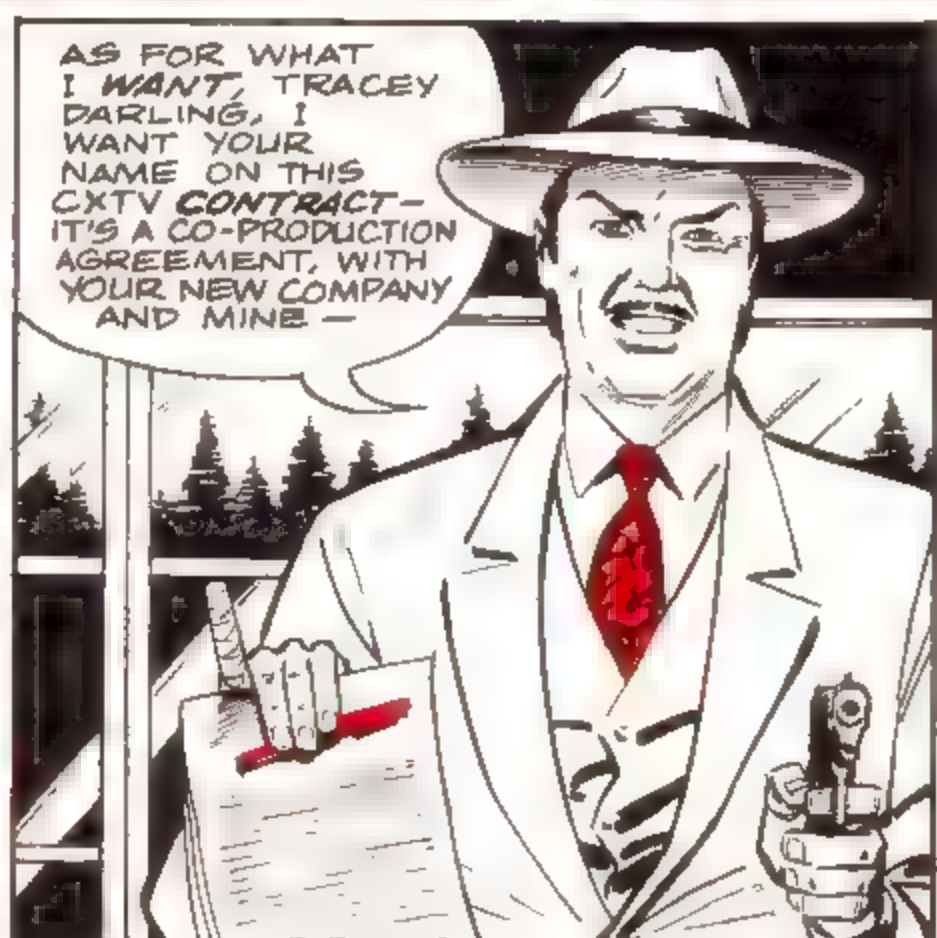


YOU SEE - NO HARM
HAS COME TO HER!
THIS IS NO ELECTRIC
CHAIR - JUST A SEASONAL
TOUCH, TO LIGHT UP
YOUR LIVES!



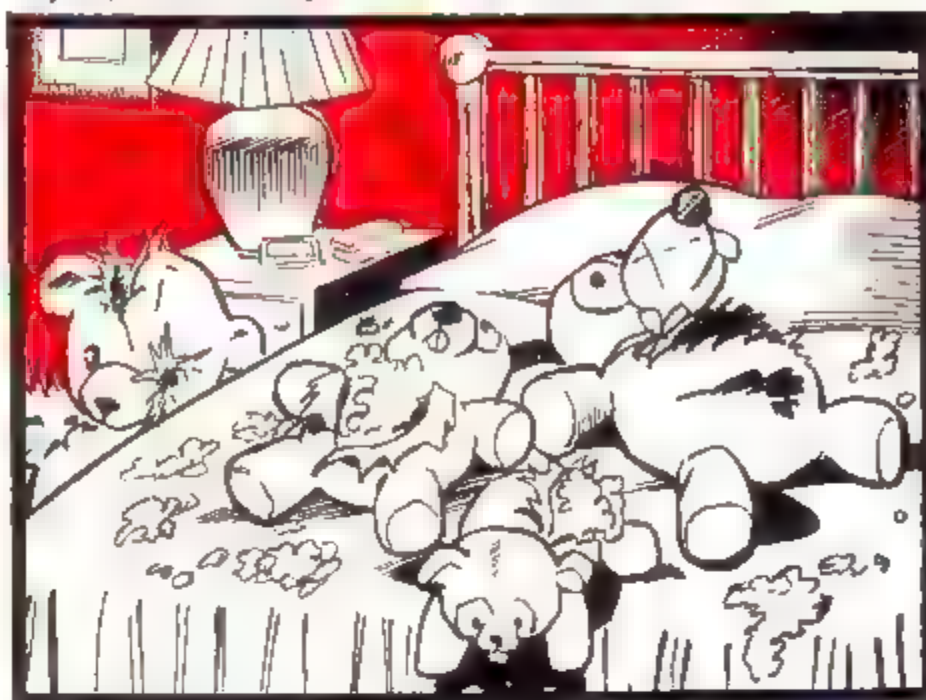
AND FOR YOU, THE LOVELIEST
CHRISTMAS TREE OF ALL - I HAVE A
VERY SPECIAL PRESENT IN MIND...
I'M GOING TO HAVE PEX BREAK
EVERY ONE OF YOUR FINGERS -



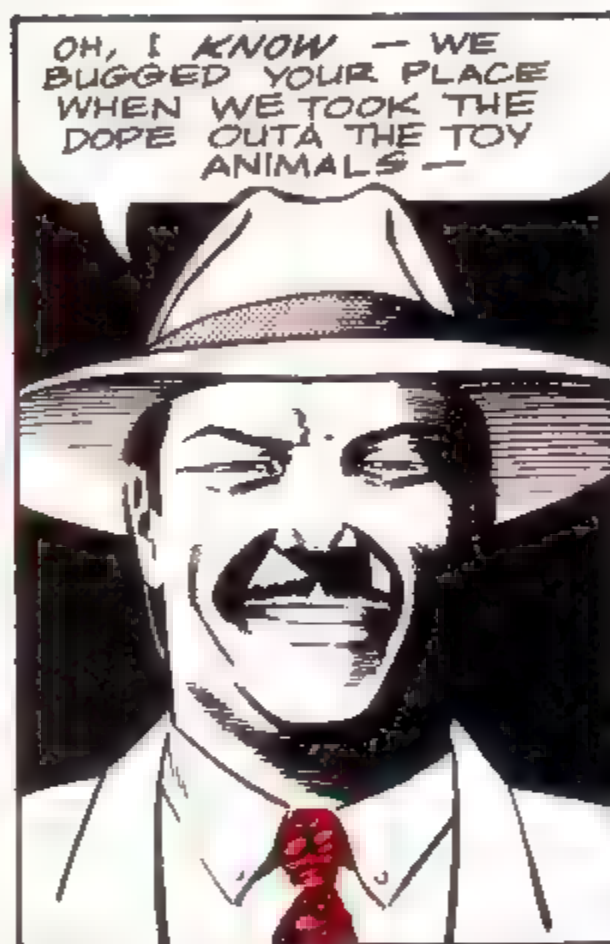




"I KNOW YOU'VE BEEN ESCALATING
YOUR DEALING TO RAISE CAPITAL TO
HELP BACK TRACEY'S NEW COMPANY —
THAT'S WHY PEX REMOVED A SHIPMENT
WORTH OUT OF THOSE STUFFED ANIMALS
YOU USE TO SMUGGLE IN THE STUFF —"



"WE GOT A FINANCIAL
ANGEL WHO'S GOT MORE
THAN ENOUGH DOUGH TO
FILL IN WHAT TRACEY
AND ME LACK —"



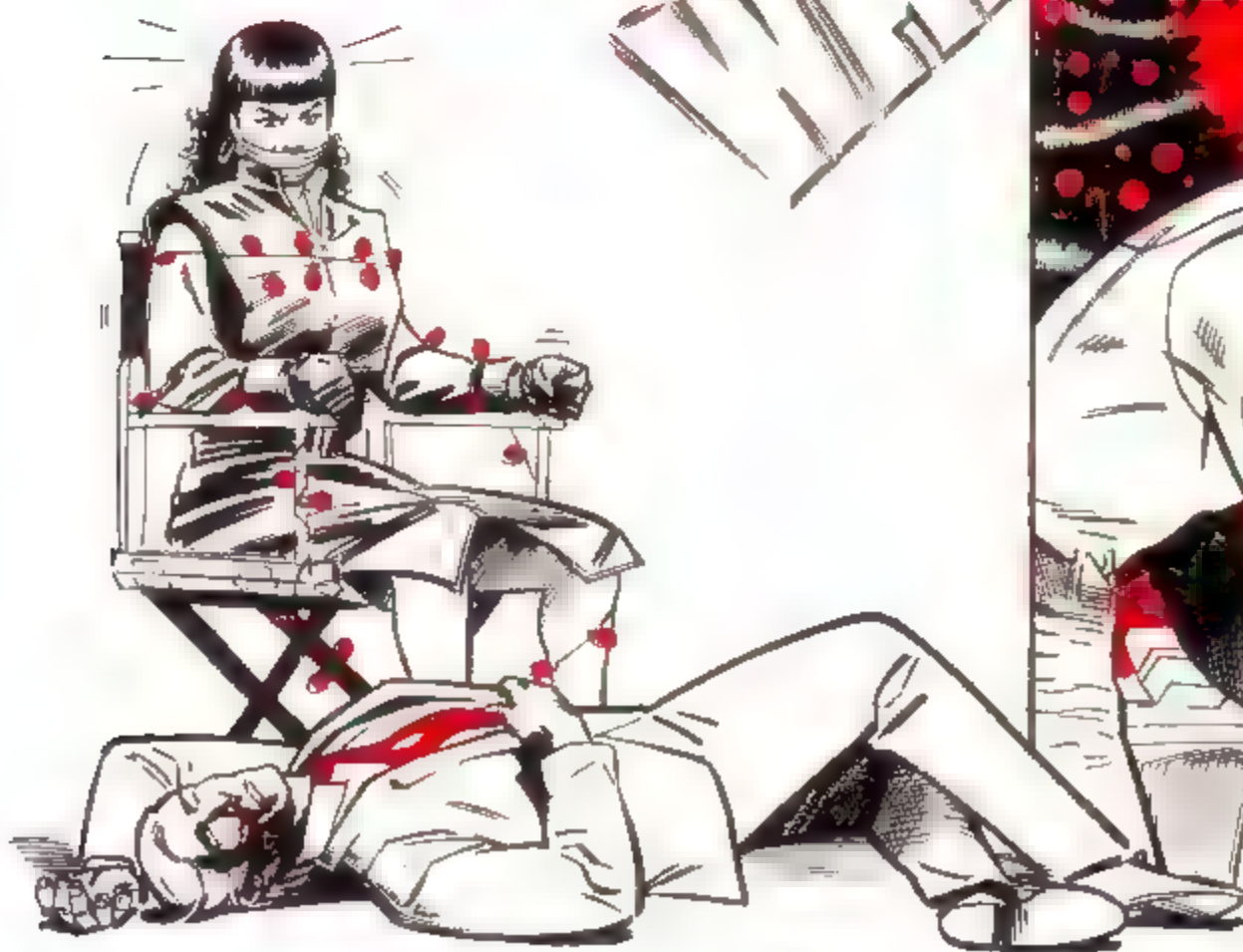


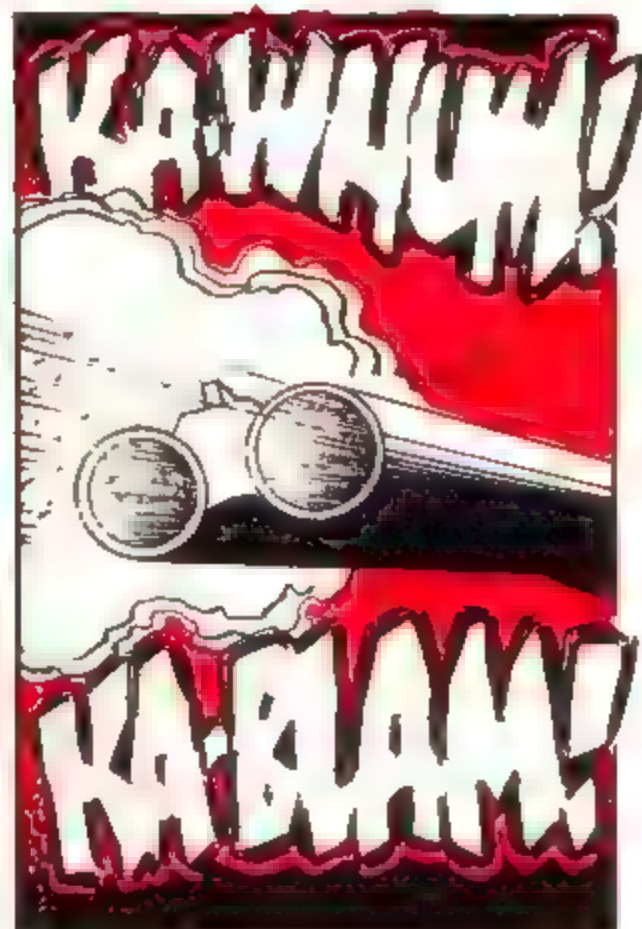
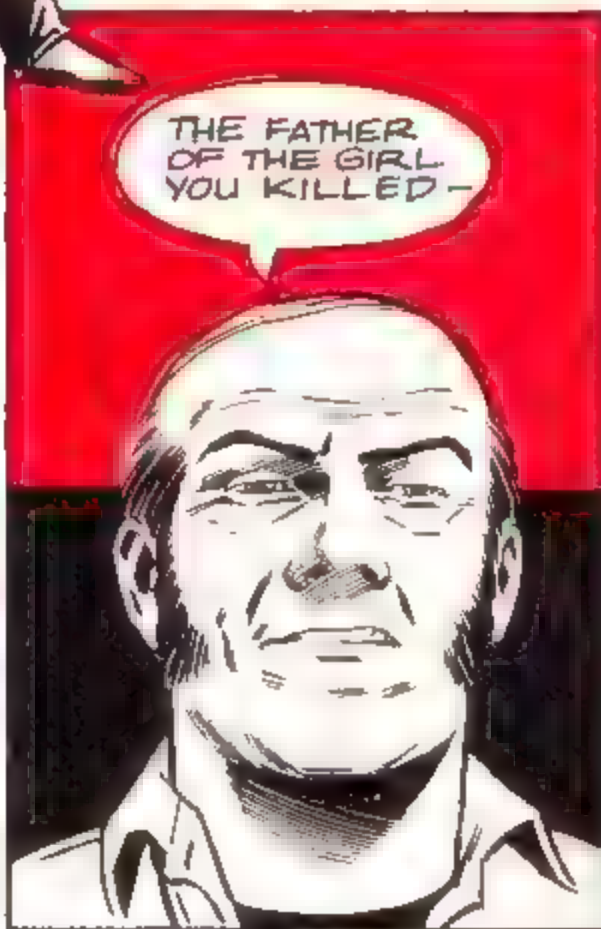
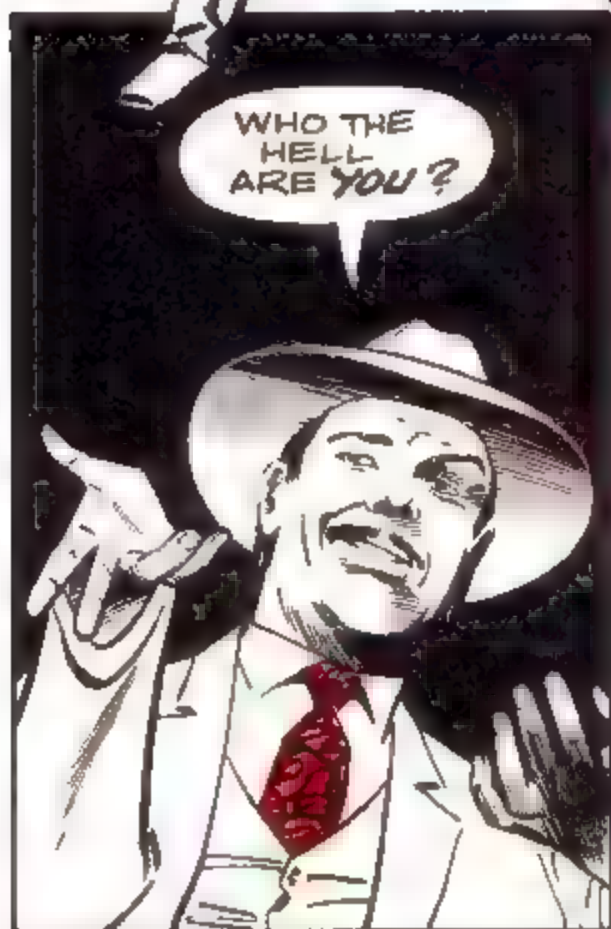
"HE DROPPED BY TO HAVE A BUSINESS
CHAT WITH TRACEY, *WITHOUT* YOU
AROUND - SO HE WAS HERE WHEN
PEX AND I ARRIVED. HE'S IN THE
GUEST BEDROOM, NOW - "



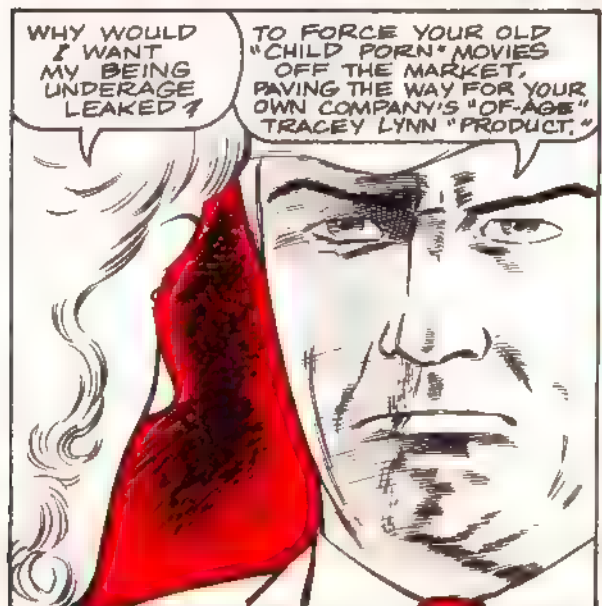
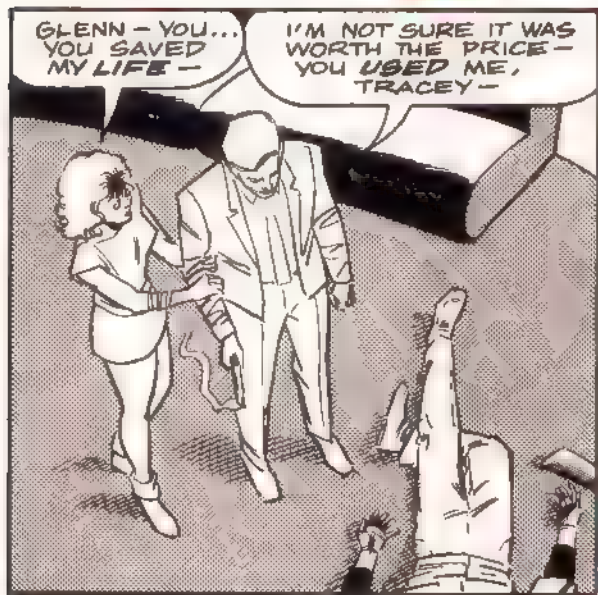


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BUY! BUY! BUY! Oh, please buy them, my mother's sick and she needs an operation, and my wife says she'll leave me if I turn out to be a failure, the bank's about to foreclose on my house, and I'm fired if this ad doesn't work! Oh, God... please!

Well, now that we've won you over to our side let's introduce you to these various comics you've agreed to purchase:

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Stig's Inferno: Imagine dying and becoming ruler of Hell all before dinner. Who said Hell and damnation couldn't be fun?

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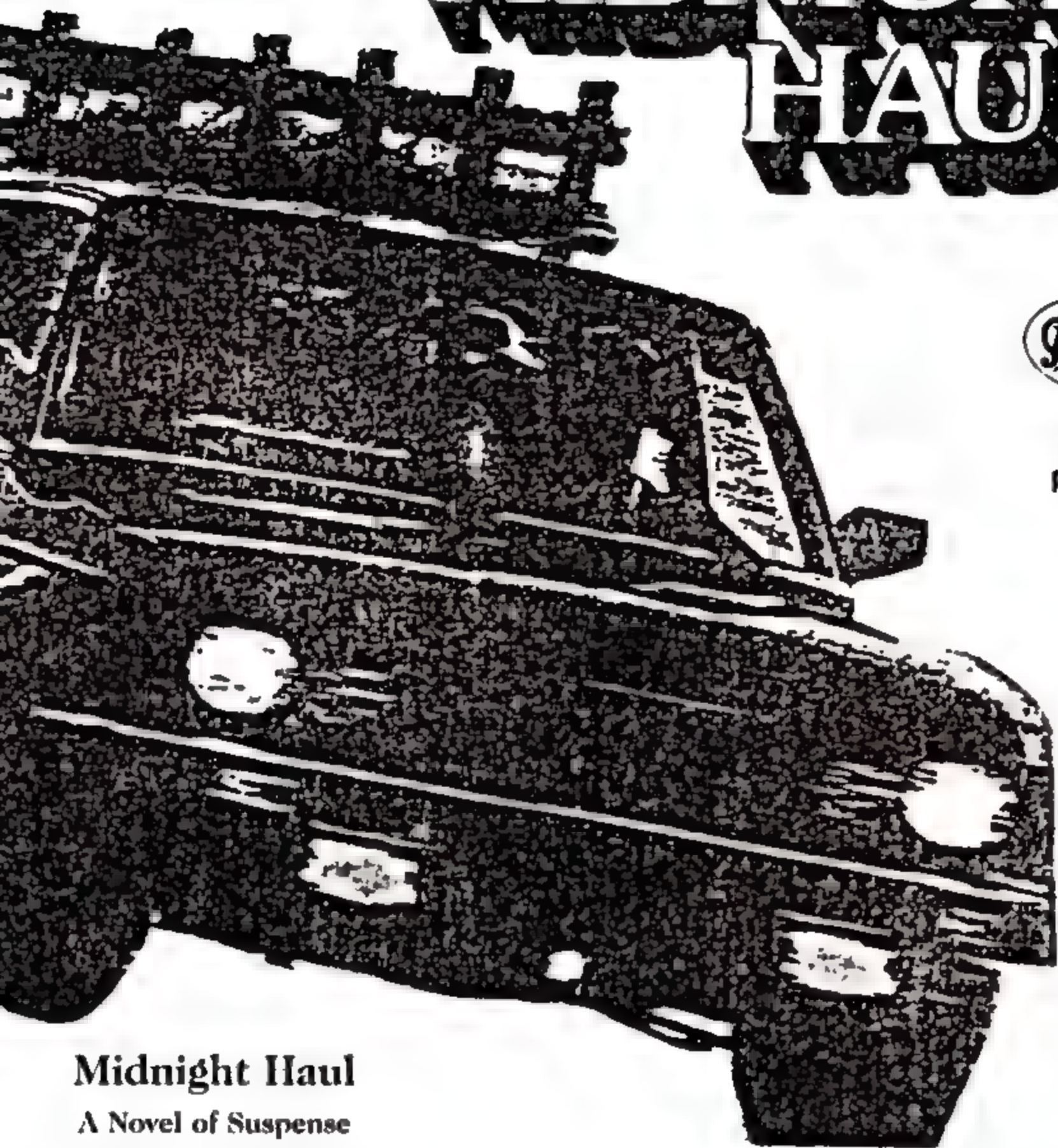
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max allan collins

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Midnight Haul

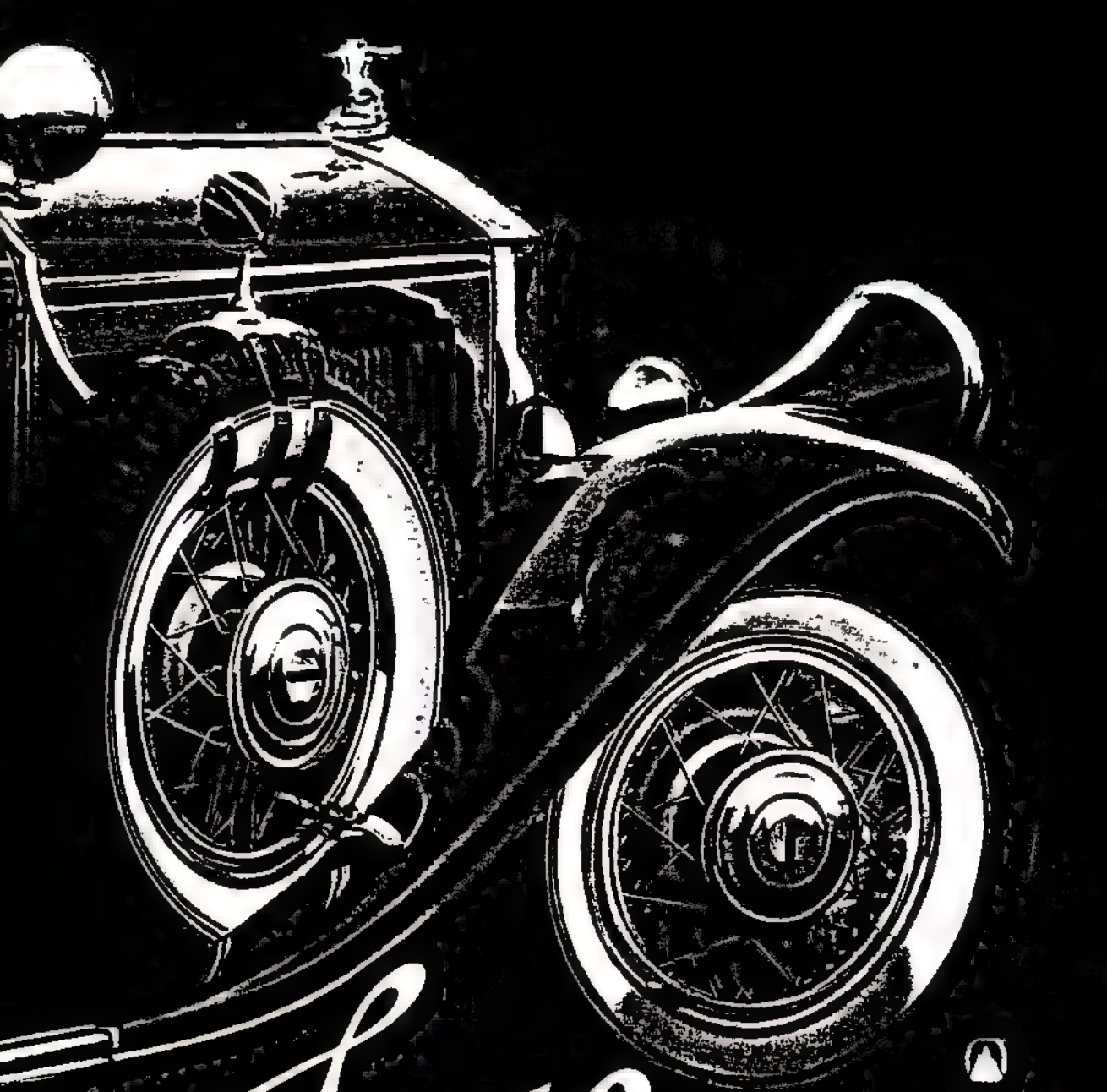
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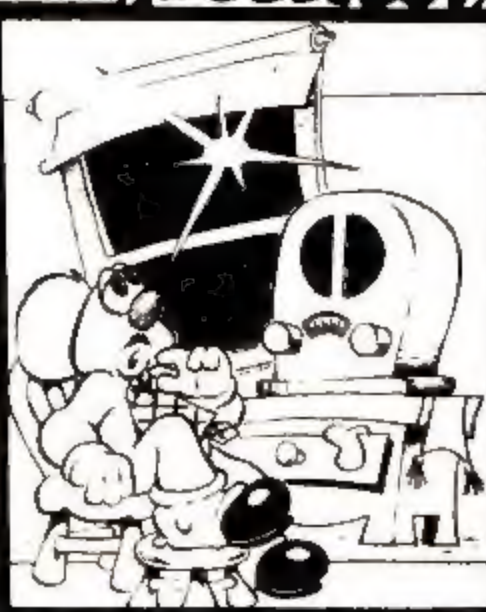
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art and story by: Jim Bricker

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Art by Terry Beatty

and Gary Kato

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As Ms. Tree attends a

New Year's Eve party

in a posh hotel. Only

to find herself and the

other guests held

captive by a

demented killer. What

that killer doesn't

realize, however, is

just how deadly a

certain hostage of his

is!!!

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JUST FOR THE RECORD,
MY BULLET KILLED HIM.

WHAT'S WRONG, MIST?
DON'T YOU LIKE
DUETS?



File of Ms. Tree-Volume Three "The Mike Mist Cookbook" written by: Terry Beatty with Gary Kato

This is the third issue of the popular reprint series: trade paperbacks. In this volume are three complete stories: "Murder at Mohawk", "Death, Danger and Diamonds" and "Music to Murder By", all of which feature Ms. Tree's back-up character, Mike Mist. Also included are 44 pages of Mist Minute Mysteries, the Mist/Ms. Tree cover for the Comic Buyer's guide and the Mist "phony twinks" ad from E-MAN, with the creator's biographies and introductions to the stories by Max Collins. Over one hundred pages in all!!! \$6.00 (US)/\$8.00 (CAN)



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written by: Dennis Mallonee
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